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PP RUEHBZ RUEHDU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMA RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO

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FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA

TO RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7393

INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 2110

RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY 1050

RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 2216

RHMFSS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHMFSS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY

RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002006

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, DRL, AF/W, INR/AA;

STATE PASS TO USTR (AGAMA);

LABOR FOR SUDHA HALEY;

COMMERCE FOR 3317/ITA/OA (KBURRESS)

TREASURY FOR DAN PETERS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV ELAB EAID ENRG PREL NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN LABOR PROTESTS AGAINST DEREGULATION

REF: A. ABUJA 1191

1B. ABUJA 1117

SUMMARY:

11. (SBU) Some 15,000 members of national and state unions, civil society organizations, and political parties marched on October 29 to the National Assembly to protest the GON's proposed deregulation of fuel prices and the lack of action on minimum wage and electoral reform issues. The Nigerian Labor Congress, Nigeria's largest umbrella union, led the effort following successful similar events in Kano, Lagos, and Maiduguri in June and July. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) General Secretary John Odah told LabOff October 30 that the Abuja protest march and rally attracted 15,000 participants from local NLC offices in each state of the country, its affiliate unions and associations, civil society and human rights organizations, and other activist organizations. Addressing the crowd, NLC President Abdulwaheed Omar declared that "if the government insists on pursuing anti-people and anti-democratic policies, which we believe will be detrimental to workers and the Nigerian people, the Labor movement will have no option but to embark on a full-blown national strike."

13. (SBU) House Committee on Labour and Productivity Chairperson Ado Audu admitted to LabOff on October 30 that he was "extremely impressed" with the large turnout "but unfortunately, "the government has already made up its mind with deregulation; it will allow the NLC to make noise, but the decision will definitely go forward."

14. (SBU) Odah told LabOff that the "government's policies on deregulation, minimum wage and electoral reform are all disappointing and punishing regular Nigerians for the incompetence and corruption of their leaders." He stated that "the average Nigerian does not trust market forces

enough to believe that deregulation will be beneficial; we all agree it is necessary to reform the status quo, but if the government is sincere, it will first stop importing refined petroleum and build its own refineries, allowing us more control over costs and productivity." He added, "Until then, "market forces will continue to be controlled by corrupt forces."

¶ 15. (SBU) Labour Party Chairman Dan Nwanyanwu told LabOff that "it is not that Nigeria does not have the money; it is the shameful mismanagement of her resources." Nwanyanwu asserted that "we are not saying anything different from what Secretary Clinton told us at her Town Hall, that the people are suffering from the corruption of its leaders."

¶ 16. (SBU) Nigeria's second largest umbrella union, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) also joined the Abuja protest. Else affirmed to PolOff 30 that the TUC stood in solidarity with the NLC, and agreed that refinery infrastructure should be the GON's first priority. He lamented that "the reason why the GON's first priority. He lamented that "the reason why we were so successful in yesterday's rally and had so many people supporting us is because more Nigerians each day are getting tired that the government is not listening to its people. This is true not just of deregulation, but minimum wage -- which has not been reviewed for over 10 years -- and especially electoral reform, which appears inactive."

¶ 17. (SBU) At the end of the rally, the NLC issued a joint communique with the TUC and the Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LACSO) that asserted that despite a 15-percent

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increase in wages over the last three years, emoluments of public office holders increased by over 800 percent. (N.B.: International Labor Organization Social Dialogue Director Tayo Fayoshin visited Nigeria in July and informed LabOff that "Nigeria's minimum wage structure needs a major overhaul, beginning with a minimum wage review, which hasn't taken place in over 10 years." End Note.)

¶ 18. (SBU) Rally speaker Femi Falana, the noted radical human rights lawyer whose clients include former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Chair Nuhu Ribadu and Niger Delta militant Henry Okah, warned that this was only the beginning of nationwide protests, especially if the 2011 election is rigged. TUC President Esele told the cheering crowd that electoral reform involved "the only solution to Nigeria's current economic and political crisis," while Labour Party Chairman Nwanyanwu criticized the GON for "robbing election victories in five states."

COMMENT

¶ 19. (SBU) This is the NLC's fourth and biggest organized protest against fuel price deregulation and inaction on minimum wage and electoral reforms. The last time these organizations coalesced around a single issue was in 2007, again over fuel prices, when they effectively shut down the country with nationwide strikes. Deregulation may be long over due as an economic and financial imperative, but fuel subsidies are among the few tangible benefits Nigerians get from government, and many Nigerians are reluctant to see them go.

SANDERS